

SATURDAY, AUG. 13, 1870.

Subject: "My Yoke is Easy."

## PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

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PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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## “MY YOKE IS EASY.”

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“And his commandments are not grievous.”—1 Jno., V. 3.

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The whole passage is this :

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.”

This is contrary to the popular impression. If by *keeping his commandments* is meant the leading of a religious life, then it countervails a very widely prevalent feeling, that though a religious life may be more honorable, and more safe, and ultimately more profitable, and by-and-by, in its own way, more joyful, yet, in its inception, for the most part, in this world, it is grievous, and that it is fitly said to be a yoke, to be a restraint of liberty. And as “religion” means binding, restraining, tying up, so men are apt to feel, not perhaps with any etymological information on that subject, but from other sources which I shall mention, that a religious life is not an easy one, and is not, on the whole, to be compared, for freedom or joyousness, with a natural life, provided that that natural life is pleasurable, and is conducted with a reasonable degree of consideration and moderation.

But here we have an appeal substantially made to our reason, in this matter. The declaration that the commandments of God on which we are to stand are not grievous, is substantially an argument propounded; and we are at liberty to reason it.

I remark, then, in the first place, that a religious life—by which we mean a life based upon the supreme commands of God, as they are revealed in Scripture—is not grievous, in that it does not require of man artificial duties, but is, in the highest and best sense of the term, the requirement of that which is natural.

We are not required either to do or to forbear things which are not in accordance with our organization—our physical, social and moral organization. We are not put to do things which are difficult as requiring us to turn aside any of our faculties, or to task them unduly, according to their nature.

On the other hand, we are not required to fulfill artificial obligations and duties. This was not always so. It could scarcely have

been said under the Mosaic economy, "His commandments are not grievous,"—are not burdensome; because the worship which was ordained by Moses for the people of Israel was a burdensome worship. Experience shows that in time it became too burdensome; and not only that, but that it could not be carried on without so distracting men from the natural to the artificial that they would go to the artificial in distinction from the natural—the *true* natural.

Now, as interpreted by Christ, religion does not stand in any forms whatever, nor in any special philosophical faiths. It certainly requires our belief in the existence of a God. It requires that we should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It requires faith and trust and obedience. But it does not require that we should believe in one church or another church. It does not require that we should believe in the creed of one church as distinguished from the creed of another church. And still less does it impose upon us onerous fasts. Nor does it require of us the observance of multiplied days. It has absolutely nothing to do with methods. It leaves those to a man's own discrimination. Religion requires simply this: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul, strength, and thy neighbor as thyself.* Devout love and disinterested benevolence—these are what religion requires of every man. And how he shall come to these; how each man in his particular circumstances shall practice them—that is left for the co-ordinated wisdom of men to find out.

The command is not grievous in this, that it says, "So many days; so many readings of the Bible; so many prayers; so many fasts; so many confessions; so many duties of this or that kind, either of avoidance or performance. There is nothing of that. All artificial elements are swept out of the Word of God; and the command stands simply in respect to the great essential naturals. We are to have a "conscience void of offence." We are to have a reason that shall be parallel with the great truths which God has revealed in his Word, and is revealing in his providence. We are to have a heart that shall be sensitive. We are to live with a love that shall be supreme toward God, and unselfish toward men.

These are the commands of God, and these are commands of things that are natural, and not artificial. The external forms of religion may have an importance; but still they are not of such importance that if one take them or reject them it will make any difference in the sight of God.

A man may sit with the quiet Quaker, and absolutely refuse all physical exposition and form; or he may sit with the sonorous Methodist, and demand that there shall be the utmost latitude of expression, but of nothing more; or he may sit with the High Churchman, and re-



quire that every single thing in religion shall have a symbolism, and that men shall go through processions, and observe days, and wear garments, and have all manner of liturgical forms. That is your liberty—not your necessity. Any man can do it that wants to, and that profits by it; and no man need do it who does not want to. That will make no difference, so that a man shall land in Jerusalem. He may go to it from the north, or he may go to it from Joppa, on the west, or he may go to it from Syria, on the east. He may take whatever road he pleases. Some roads are much more pleasant than others; but he may go over the mountain, or through the gorge; he may go upon the traveled way or across the wilderness; he may act his own pleasure about how he goes; only let his feet at last stand in Zion, and before God.

The commands of God are, not that we shall do so many things, and do them so often, and observe such days, and have such a form of belief, and such church ordinances. A great many men think so. A great many men think that when they are attempting to be religious there is but one way, and that that way is to join the church, and ask the church what it says; and they think that the church stands in the place of God, and that they are to listen to its voice, and that they are religious when they obey it. No; the commandments respect the great fundamental original faculties of our nature; and we are commanded simply to carry them up and out in obedience to God. That is our duty. How we are to fulfill these commandments is a matter of indifference, so that we come to the right results—the fruits of love.

Now, it is not grievous to ask men to conform to their own nature. It is not grievous—it is rational; it is right—to demand that an eagle shall fulfill the duties of the organization which God gave it. It is right that the dove should be a dove, and come up to its nature. It is right that the ox should fulfill the ox's nature. It is right that the little singing bird should fulfill its nature. It is right that men should fill out and have the full exercise of their nature. This is the characteristic element of manhood. The moral development of man is manhood; and all below that is animalhood, which we have in common with the brute creation.

All our duties, then, are in accordance with our nature. They are in accordance, not, perhaps, with what men have been accustomed to call *nature*; because mostly men have given that name to their lower or passional nature. We therefore are said to have a lost or fallen nature—a corrupt nature; and we are cautioned against trusting it. And in that sense this artificial nature—that which has come to be our nature more properly—we ought not to esteem. We ought not to trust it. Our character is deplorable as measured by the divine law.

But our natural endowments—that is to say, those more elemental faculties which God gave us—stand. And the duty of religion is simply that we shall find out what faculties these are, and go back to them, and live in accordance with the original indications of the divine law in the creation of man. And no man can, on philosophical grounds, say that it is a grievous command that a man should be true to himself, true to the best part of himself—in other words, that he should subordinate his lowest self to his higher and nobler self.

Nor are we put under any commandments for the sake of another's benefit, but really and truly for our own. It is true that we owe obligation to God. It is true that we are in that sense indebted. It is true that we, as his creatures, and tied to him by innumerable benefits, ought, for His sake, to love and to obey. Yet it is really for our own sakes that He commands love and obedience. "All things," says the apostle, "are for your sakes." And God commands us to love one another for our own sakes. There are many governments that are very hard to bear, that are operose and burdensome, partly because they command things which are for the benefit of the government, but not for the benefit of the governed. The Turkish government over its subjected Greek provinces is a most burdensome government. The Roman government was a most exacting and a most hard-hearted and hard-handed government. The old Roman spirit was not simply bellicose, but it was despotic in all the after administrations in its provinces. And men were required to do things, not that would make themselves richer and happier and better. The idea of making a State strong by making each individual citizen more prosperous, had not then entered into the conception of legislators, or of governors themselves. The idea was to make the governing hand omnipotent; to make the imperial government rich and strong. It was to give the ruling authority absolute control over all provinces. Therefore taxes were levied, services were required, punishments were threatened and executed, lawless administrations were established throughout all the Roman dynasty, that were not for the benefit of the governed, but were only for the benefit of the governors.

There is absolutely nothing of this in the divine administration. That is paternal. Neither is there in it any of that lingering selfishness which belongs to all earthly paternal government. It is disinterested, it is more than disinterested, it is self-sacrificing paternity. For God is He who so loved the world, gross, sunk in sin and in barbarity, that He gave His own second self—His own Son—to die for us, while yet we were his enemies.

It is not therefore the requisition of an exacting paternity; it is the government of love—of household love—of love whose central philos-



ophy is the philosophy of domesticity. It is that government which is imposed upon us for our sakes, to make us wiser, and nobler, and freer, and stronger. And we shall find almost transports of exclamation in various parts of the apostolic teaching, particularly of Paul's.

I do not wonder when I consider what the Pharisee had to go through, how he was tied up, what notions he had of the narrow bounds that he walked in, that when those bounds were enlarged his religion was not destroyed, but he had more a God than he had before, and a more impressive sense of obligation than he had before, and such a freedom as he had never had before, and such joyousness and enthusiasm as he never had before, as was the case with Paul when he was converted—I do not wonder, when I consider these things, that the apostle spoke of himself as having come out of bondage into liberty. I do not wonder that he triumphed, in writing to the Galatians, saying that they had become free men. I marvel not at these things, because there is nothing in the world so free as love. That levels all distinctions. That makes all duties choices. That makes bitter things sweet, and turns all juices to sugar. That takes all heat from the sun in overmeasure. That makes all ways flowery ways. Love enough, and there springs summer out of the very bosom of winter. Love enough, and all things become easy.

Now, the divine government is this: "Thou shalt love." If there is anything more, it is, "Thou shalt love with all thy heart." If there is anything more, it is, "Thou shalt love with all thy mind and strength." First, and second and third, and last, it is, "Thou shalt love." And of all experiences, none is more blessed, none is freer, none is more exhilarating, than this divinest experience of love.

And if it be so when the taper is lit in the lower affections, and as between unworthy natures, so little susceptible of creating any deep affection or any great admiration one for the other, what should be the magic throb of that love kindled in our bosom, when it is the mighty God that stands over against us, and offers himself with impunity, and is our very Suitor, giving his power of heart to the wilderness and barrenness of our hearts! I marvel not that He says, "Thou shalt love me with all thy heart, and soul, and mind and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." And such a commandment is not grievous: it is very joyous.

These commandments, I remark once more, are the only roads to full, comprehensive and enduring happiness. We have wandered out of the way. We have, in ignorance partly, and in wilfulness partly, formed habits of living contrary to our best nature. And every man feels the discord. For though men may dispute about theology, they seldom dispute about experience. If you ask

men, "Is there never a turbulent irruption of your passions into your affections? Do they never soil you? Is there never rebellion in your case, so that your reason stands on one side, and your disobedient affections and passions on the other? Are not all your expectations of what is right and good one way, and your will the other? Is not your life spent mostly in breaking what you know to be right commandments, and the little that remains of it in a pitiful sorrowing which does not work repentance, nor much change? Are you not yourself satisfied that you are perpetually violating your best ideals of life and of duty?" It will not do for a man to look at himself too much. A journalizing of every man's experience from day-to-day, and a contrasting it with the true ideal of a manly life, would strike despair through any soul. It is only by hiding and forgetting it that men can rise above despondency into true enjoyment.

Men are living so as to abate happiness. Not that sinful men may not be happy. That I do not doubt. Not that there is not enjoyment in things that are wrong. There is enjoyment in things that are wrong. Not that sin does not pay. It does pay. But it is a poor price that it pays, and a price that is delusive at last. It pays wages that are very quickly squandered. It pays, to be sure; but it wears out the man who takes the pay. The wages of sin are death, in the end. In the first place, the wages of sin are what buds are, that promise blossoms. They delight for the instant by their sweetness. They are like the book that the Revelator saw, which was sweet in his mouth, and bitter in his belly. Sin is sweet in the mouth, and bitter in digestion. It lies hard on the stomach. Sin has present remuneration. And nothing can be more foolish than to tell children and men that there is no pleasure in sin. Do you suppose that the world would ever have gone agog after sinful things if there had been no pleasure in them. There is pleasure in them.

The thief has a pleasure of excitement in stealing. Even the robber has some sort of pleasure in striking down his victim. The miser has his curmudgeonish pleasure. There is pleasure in the cup, in the song, and in the dance. All these things have their pleasure; but they are consuming the susceptibility of pleasure from other sources, by their concentration of intense excitements. Coarse pleasures have a brief period, and then they leave the soul in a wilderness. There is nothing remaining to it.

A great place, the soul is. Ample provision is made in it for enjoyment. But he who lives for the senses takes only one single kind of enjoyment, and so employs that that it destroys all the rest.

Now the duty imposed upon us by God, is, that we shall use ourselves according to our nature, and according to God's command-



ments, which are based on his own everlasting, immutable nature, so that every part of us shall be concordant with itself, concordant with natural law, and concordant with moral law. And so every part of the soul becomes vocal with joy. And it is a joy that has this peculiarity, that it is lowest and least in the beginning; that it quietly increases in volume; that it is more and more vocal at times when all ordinary joys begin to shrink and are silent; that it waxes again when other powers and faculties cease to go; that it triumphs in that hour when heart and flesh fail; and that when death annihilates the common joys of men, it is but an emancipator of the joys which we have when we serve God according to his commandments.

Why, then, is it, that men think that religion is a grievous thing; that it is gloomy and hard? If, in this brief exposition of the essential nature of religion, we see that it conforms to our organization, conforms to the world in which we dwell, conforms to our present needs, and augments as we go on in life, preparing us for the life which is to come, why should men have derived so very different an idea of it? Because men have very largely had presented to them the machinery of religion, instead of religion. It has been as if a farmer should present to you plows, crowbars, harrows, carts, wagons, spades, shovels, rakes, all manner of utensils, and they should produce the impression on you that those were the only apples and pears that there were on the farm. Men look at Sunday. That is a tool or instrument. They look at the church. That is nothing but a machine-shop. The church is a mere mechanical arrangement by which men may be educated in knowledge, and receive an impulse in the right direction. But it is not religion.

Why, is the old mill, that goes clattering night and day on the stream, bread? Would you gnaw a millstone? or, would you marvel, if you did, that you still hungered? Men have had presented Sundays, and churches, and all manner of church economies, which I honor, and some parts of which I observe, and which I certainly do not dissuade you from observing; but I want you to understand that they are all of them man-made, and all of them mere conveniences, simple methods by which we help ourselves to get that which is behind them, and is different from them, and is not produced by them—namely, the religious element.

But where men have heard churches disputing—this church up, and that down; this church broad, and that narrow; this church high, and that low; where men have gone about and seen churches, some with steeples towering above others; some with this church economy, and some with that; some with this platform, and some with that, they have become bewildered, and have said, "If that is religion, I do not know

but I am about as well off without it as I would be with it, ordinarily." And when men look at the church, and see what they do see; when they see the disagreement which there is between the members of churches themselves; when they see all sorts of worldlings and disreputable men calling themselves Christians, they get a very vague idea of what religion really is. And looking at the mass of those who pass as religious, it is not marvellous to me that men should say, "This is grievous business. I may come to it yet; I do not want to be lost; I will take any medicine rather than be lost; but it is a hard dose." I should feel very much as they do under the same circumstances. If religion were presented to me as that mere externality which many men are impressed that it is; if those things which are called religion were presented to me, and I were told that they were all that there was of religion, I would reject them. I would not take them. They are not soul-feeding. And I do not wonder that people think that religion is grievous—and all the more because with this an ascetic element has been introduced—by good men, too.

Where men lived in times that were exceedingly lax; where they saw all the power of the land arrayed on the side of license and licentiousness; where they saw wealth devoted to the lowest uses; where they saw pleasure made only a snare and a delusion; where they saw all forms of conviviality still leading men down, down, I do not wonder that large numbers of them sprung up with such zeal for purity and integrity as carried them to the opposite extreme, and led them to reject flowers and music, and to become ascetics. Ascetics are the products of ages of utter and abandoned license.

But though the age and the necessity are gone, there are men who are still ascetic hereditarily. They have ceased to discriminate. They feel that if you are going to be religious, you must make up your mind to give up almost everything in this world.

When I preach that a true Christian has all the good that there is in the world, as well as the promise of after life, men say, "What do you make out of the example of Christ?" Well, I make out of Christ's example, this: that for about thirty years he lived at home, and worked at his trade, a simple peasant and carpenter, like any other mechanic. There was nothing special about him—nothing that attracted the least attention. He was not distinguished from any citizen. And when he began his ministration he was not ascetic. While John was thundering as an ascetic reformer in the lower parts of Palestine, Jesus was at Cana of Galilee, for seven days, at a marriage feast, and created not less than from fifty to a hundred gallons of wine, according to the Gospel, that he might assist in the festivities, with a decorous sobriety sympathizing with them. Jesus was a most loveable man; he was



a most genial man; he was a most conversable man. He went to the feasts of rich men, and sat at their tables. Some of his most striking discourses were those which he delivered at feasts in the houses of rich men. He sat with the poor man, with the lawyer, with the publican, with the soldier. Wherever a man met him, there was that genial sympathy manifested toward him. I can take no other instance more forcible than that of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, to show that religion should make a man cheerful, genial, conversable, enjoying and enjoyable. That was his example. And though at the end of his life, when he laid it down as a sacrifice for the world, he was a sufferer; yet that was but a single phase, a solitary aspect, of his history; and the ministerial life, as well as that life which anteceded it, of the Lord Jesus Christ, was full of society, full of enjoyment, full of pleasure.

Therefore, when men say, "What do you do with the life of Christ?" I take it up, and say, Live just as purely, and with such a noble, genial, cheerful life, as he did. He never girded himself with sackcloth. And when they reproached him because he would not fast, he said, "The days will come when my disciples will fast; but not now. I am with them"—as much as to say, "So long as I am with them they cannot help being happy." They could not be made to fast while he was with them.

Now, where a rigorous view of religion is presented; where men are told that no matter what one is doing, the instant the clock strikes twelve, the needle must be dropped, there comes that intolerable superstitious notion that there is such a thing as holy time. Why, do you suppose that we are living in the time of Moses? Are days consecrated? Is the ground consecrated? Is there consecration in a stone or in a brick? Is there consecration in one chronological period in contrast within another?

"What do you mean"? it is asked, "That we shall not observe the Sabbath"? I mean that you *shall* observe it; but that you shall observe it as free men, and not as men in bondage; not as under taskmasters, but with a rational perception that there is benefit in it; of your own sweet willingness, and not because you are afraid that God stands with a whip which he will bring down on your back, or with a pencil with which he will mark down your delinquencies against your name. And yet men will draw the belt up until there is no breath left in the body. And people living on this rigor of religious life say, "It is said not to be grievous; but I think it *is* grievous."

Then there is another reason why people think it is grievous. As a general thing, men who profess to be Christians, and who are in a measure leavened with Christianity, are so far from having developed

the true Christian type of character, that they present rather the appearance of men under great difficulties than the appearance of very lovely men having had conquests. If the fruit of the spirit is love, joy in the Holy Ghost, peace, faith, patience, temperance, and such qualities as these, why, then, all I have to say, is, that the fruit does not get ripe on most boughs. Men see what are called Christians, and they see what are called Christian experiences, and they reach up and take one, and bite it, and it is not to be desired again.

Are Christians of such a disposition that you mark them sure? I never make a mistake in judging of flowers. I never smell of a nettle or a thistle thinking it is a honeysuckle. My honeysuckle tells me by night and by day when it blossoms. I never go astray in autumn in regard to my grape vine. I know where the grapes are both by the smell, and by the touch, and by sight. I cannot make any mistake here.

But if we bring forth Christian fruit that hangs on our boughs—joy, peace, faith, gentleness, humility, holiness, long suffering, hope—so that the whole tree-top of our life is full of these in abundant clusters, and so that the fragrance of them is all about us, do you suppose that any one would need an argument in favor of Christianity, an apology for it, or a defence of its doctrine? I will venture to say that if such a life as this existed in the Church, if that church was an orchard, and every tree was hanging to the ground with such fruit on its boughs, it would make almost no difference in the world what the creed was. Men would swallow any creed for the sake of going into a church where the members brought forth such fruits as these. And one reason why men do not believe that there is much in religion, is, that there is not much in it as they see it exemplified.

Yet, I would say, on the other side, in the case of many of those men who are derided and set aside, and said to be insincere, that the work has just begun, and only just begun; that it is convalescence, but not health. Men have started, and taken a few steps; but they have not developed largely the truth of Christ in them. And so, when to rigorous machinery, and to a very severe presentation of doctrines, you add a comparatively unlovely Christian life,—as the life of men in hospitals,—or the life of men who have been grievously perverted, but who are striving to get back again to their normal condition, then all these elements, all these things which men see, fail to make a favorable impression upon those who look upon them.

On the other hand, wherever there is a true Christian, there you are sure to find men won toward religion. If there is in any neighborhood a person whose influence is always sought; who is always considerate of others; who is always full of sympathy; if there is any one in a



neighborhood, when a man is in trouble, whom all think of at once as that man or woman counsellor, faithful, full of kindness, who, day and night, would, if an opportunity were presented, serve disinterestedly their necessity, point out that person and ask, "Is religion a grievous thing?" Everybody—the rudest, the coarsest, the most belluine nature—bows down before that example, and feels that it is a beautiful thing.

There is something awful in true holiness. There is something impressive, even to the rudest natures, where they actually see the beauty and the power of the Christian disposition under wise control, until they learn to trust it, knowing that it is not a vain show, nor a pretence, nor a counterfeit; where they see that it is real, and that it preaches to them "the beauty of holiness." And in "the beauty of holiness" they believe that religion is not grievous. The commandments of God, if so exemplified, become most beautiful. They are holy, and just, and good as well.

But there is another reason why men feel that religion is grievous. It is because of their own experience. It is because they have attempted to live a religious life, and have never given their whole will and their whole heart to it. Men want to build themselves as carpenters build bureaus, using pine for the whole substance of it, and a little thin veneering for a finish, to make it look beautiful. Men want to build themselves up in all manner of gross, worldly forces, and have a thin veneering of righteousness or religion over that, just to cover down these other things, and make them beautiful, and make them sell well. And where men just surface themselves with religion, where men just polish off with religion, it is simply an irritant. It acts simply as a provocative. It keeps up before them a rule, or a conception, or an ideal, which they do not at all either accomplish or strive to accomplish. Half-way measures that are allowed to men are always disturbances to them. A man who is half-way between being sick and being well is never a very happy man, and is never a very profitable man to look at. A man who is half sea-sick does not enjoy voyages. A man who has had his leg broken and half cured, is not in a particularly comfortable condition. And just like these men are they who are attempting to be religious. They are just far enough advanced from their worldly courses to be all the time vexing and harassing themselves with these moral obligations, which sometimes they meet and obey, and which sometimes they evade. All manner of irregularities, resistances and abnormal feelings spring up. And men are not happy under such circumstances. He is happy who gives himself up unreservedly to any course of religious life, and makes everything else consistent with that. Some become much happier than others, according to the system which they follow; but there is a cer-

tain sort of harmony which brings peace where a man surrenders himself wholly; where a man gives himself entirely to Christ. As soon as the battle is fought in a man, and all the great central impulses of his being are brought under the supreme control of the Divine Spirit, he finds satisfaction. But how few there are of such! How many men there are who are just a little religious—who have become a little healed, but who are for the most part afflicted with murmuring and complaining sickness.

As for those who have not begun a religious life, oftentimes they make essays, tentative endeavors; and they may be said to have approached it. Men have sometimes, as it were, *tried on* religion. They are most apt to do this when they have gone wrong. There is nothing which makes a man so quake as to have gone wrong, and to be afraid of detection. Oh! how he fears and sweats and wants to get back to something that shall reconcile him to himself, and make him happier! I have known men, under such circumstances, to go to church, oh! how fierce! and say prayers, oh! how regularly! and read the longest and toughest chapters, oh! with what pertinacity! and do a great many things,—until the scare had a little worn off, they gradually got over it, and, as it were, got out again, and fell once more into their old ways. And then, if you talk with them, they say, "I know about religion now. I have tried it. Why, I have been religious for a week together. I tell you it may be necessary, by-and-by; but it is a hard road to travel."

What would you think of a man, city-bred, lily-fingered, soft-jointed, and soft-muscled, who should say, "They tell me that there is great pleasure in living in the saddle, but I believe it is a lie; for I tried it one morning. I got a hard trotting horse, and rode several hours; and I was sore for days afterwards. I do not believe a word of what they say of horse-back riding."

And yet here are men who put themselves on the most unaccustomed exercises, and in their most external form and lowest ways; and they are so conceited as to suppose that they have had a taste, an experience, of religion. And when you talk to such men, what is their idea of religion? It is this: "I must leave off my old companions. I must go in among the old owls. When I get up Sunday morning, I cannot ride out; I cannot write letters; I cannot have a good time; I cannot meet my drinking companions and tell stories." They have lots of stories that must go on the shelf. There are ever so many things that they cannot do. And their idea of religion is, simply that it is a state in which they cannot do what they have been doing. There is no positiveness, no upward springing, no new life, no new power, in their impression concerning it. To their thought it is merely breaking off



from sin. And to such men religion must have a very gloomy aspect.

Ah! how different it is in reality! How hard it is for a man to drop off all his old relishes! While yet they are strong in him, and he has no other relishes, how he clings to them! A man who by famine has been driven to a mouldy loaf of bread, munches it in his hovel with avidity; and there comes a friend to him, and says, "Let me take you out of your misery. Throw away your loaf, and come with me." "Throw away my loaf?" says he. "I cannot spare this." But once set before him a wheaten loaf; once bring in the food smoking from the range, and set it before him, and how quick will he throw away his garbage!

Once bring the true relishes of holiness into a man's soul; once let the real life of Christ spring up in him; once let a man know what joy there is in disinterested kindness; once let a man follow Christ in suffering for another; let a man deny himself; let him and his wife and children—his whole household—deprive themselves of real comforts of life, in order to carry light and balm into a distressed household over the way; and let them talk it over together at night, and speak of the gratitude of those who have been relieved, and of the wondrous thanks of the little children—and how much nobler they feel! What a dignity they have! What a sense of manhood and womanhood they have! Instead of gobbling up their beneficence, and giving nothing to other people, they take their abundance, and share it with that household. And if need be, they take upon themselves more work, heavier tasks, that they may thus serve others. And they are amply repaid by the gratitude which is called forth by their benefactions, to say nothing of the consciousness which they have of acting from their higher impulses.

When a man gets a taste of self-denial, of disinterested kindness for others, the Gospel is preached to him. He receives tidings, good news, which he never could have had except by practical works of benevolence. Once let a man have a taste for true religion; once let a man feel the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and experience the aspiration of the soul for purity; once let a man have a sense of the divine love and real hungering and thirsting after righteousness—once let a man begin to taste these verities, and all other pleasures, in comparison with them, pale and lose their power.

No man is fit to judge of what religion is—as to whether it is beautiful and joyous, and free, and most to be desired—until he has had some actual experience of it. And then, when one has once tasted it, he will say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." This is the testimony of an over-crowning and all-conquering love. Though there be angels and

arch-angels in heaven; though all one's children have gone before him, and are there; though the dearest companion of his early affections, and the mother that bore him, are there; though sainted names in multitudes are there, the heart once taught to love, looking up, always says, "There is but one thing in the world, and that is what we love most and strongest. Whom have I in heaven but thee? Heaven would be empty if thou wert not there; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

To those that are called of God, and that have a willing soul, the way to Christ is a very easy way. It is the way toward yourself, too. It is the way in which, when once you begin fairly to walk in it, you shall have the advantage of your reason, of your restored moral powers, and of all your affections, in their best estate. You shall have every advantage that can come from your harmonization with the great laws outside of you—the best laws of nature. You shall have all the help which comes from the Spirit of the living God, who watches, and in all the earth sees nothing that draws his heart quicker than a soul that desires to repent and return from the evil way. Oh! how God longs to have souls come to him!

A child, disobedient, has gone out, as it was forbidden to do; and has wandered from the house into the thicket; and from the thicket into the forest; and, bewildered and lost and scared, it rushes hither and thither, until night descends, and darkness wraps it in, and it lays itself down under some sheltering rock, or by the side of some huge log, sobbing itself to sleep; and, between dreams and wakings, both hideous, moans, and calls for father and mother, and more than all for *mother*, and thinks that there is no heart that is so saving as the heart of mother. But what does that child suffer compared with the distracted mother, who, missing it, calls out; who, receiving no answer, runs out after it, and searches right and left, in fearful places—down in the well and in the cistern; who looks every whither, thinking of Gipsies, and wild beasts, and a hundred other things; who alarms the neighborhood, and sends out men searching in the fields and woods, and filling the air all night with racket and outcry, none calling more than herself; and who, when the grey dawn comes, and the men, wearied, go home, will not go, but still holds on, until, by-and-by, in her almost distraction, her ear, sharpened beyond the ear of any other, hears some sound, and stands still as silence itself, and hears it again—the moan of a child—and, quicker than ever eagle sped for its prey, urged by love, speeds to it, and finds her lost darling. And tell me, as she takes that spent child up into her bosom, is there any other rapture like that of a mother? Oh yes. God says, "A mother may forget her sucking child; yet will not I forget thee."



God's love for those who are scattered and lost is intenser and deeper than the love even of a mother; and if there be in this congregation any one who is conscious of guilt, and who wants to come back to innocency; if there be one who is lost in the woods, and does not know how to find his way out, God longs to bring you home more than you long to get there. He has been calling, calling, calling, and listening for your answer. And when you are found, and you lay your head on the bosom of Jesus, and you are at rest, you will not be so glad as He will be who declared that, like a shepherd, he had *joy over one sinner that repented more than over ninety and nine just persons that needed no repentance.*

And so, I call you to yourselves. I call you back to your own nature. I call you to your better selves. I call to that God from whom you sprang, and to whom you go again. I call you to the life of duty, the life of liberty, the life of purity, the life of joy, and the life of immortality.



## PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We rejoice, our Father, that thou hast made it possible for us to commune with thee; that thou dost reach down thy thoughts unto ours, which could not rise unto thee. Thou art so much above us, thou art so lifted up into an air where we cannot dwell except when thou dost give us thine own life, and quicken ours, that we never should find our way home, and never should know our Father, and never should have that great love by which we shall overcome life and death, and conquer immortality, but for the graciousness of thy condescension. We thank thee that thou hast permitted us so many times to come, and made the way now a way of flowers. We have gone through the wilderness to thee; but coming back it was a paradise. We have gone bearing burdens, and knew not what became of them. Thy very look had turned them all to lightness. We have gone with disappointments, only to have them interpreted into mercies. We have gone with sorrow and confusion; but behold, while yet we were confessing, the greatness of thy forgiving love broke out upon us, as the sun breaks through the storm-clouds, and all the terror was gone. We have come to thee often and often, weary and heavy-laden, and we have taken thy yoke, and it was no yoke; and thy burden, and it was not burdensome. O Lord our God, we thank thee for the past experience, and that out of it we derive all argument of hope. Not because of what thy word hath said, but because of what thou hast said in us, and a hundred times fulfilled, we believe in thee. And we rejoice that we may thus increase our faith from day to day. And as we go onward; as we draw near to thee; as we become ripper for the heavenly land; as we have the intimations of truth; as we work out the spirit of love more and more perfectly, we hope yet to be in that state by which it will be possible for us to discern the invisible, and to live as seeing Him who is invisible.

We pray that thou wilt, to-night, forgive us our sins. Wash out, we beseech of thee, every stain and spot, that we may be white as snow. Not only

grant to us the forgiveness of our sins, but heal us in those fountains which sin brings. Purify our motives, and search our hiddenmost life. By thy Spirit, as with a glowing light, illumine, and, as with a living fire cleanse us, that all dross may be taken away. And we pray that thou wilt prepare us for all the duties of life. Prepare us for its disappointments; for its sorrows; for whatever is in reserve for us. And may we not shrink who are the followers of the Sufferer. Grant that we may be willing to bear our cross, as thou didst bear thine. We that are sin-laden—should we not suffer, when thou the sinless One made an offering for our sins? May we not count ourselves better than the Master; and may we rejoice from day-to-day that we are permitted to suffer for Christ's sake, and be only anxious that suffering shall do its perfect work, and make us patient and gentle, and make us more and more reverential, and truthful, and hopeful, that the work of God may be perfectly done in us. And as we do not doubt our friends who are kind to us, so may we never doubt thee, the best of all friends. Grant that our trust in thee may be more confiding, and that it may have more comfort in it. And in dark hours, and days of discouragement, whatever else fails us, oh! let not the sweet face of Jesus, looking upon us, full of forgiveness, and love, and mercy, fail us. And may thy countenance, by night and by day, at home and abroad, and everywhere, be our Comfort and our Guiding Star.

We pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon us now assembled, pastor and people, for the last time for the space of weeks—it may be for the last time. Grant, we pray thee, that we may separate, commending each other to God. Grant that in a holy hope, and in the firm faith of thy truth, we may go on our several ways. In trouble, when anxious with forebodings, grant that we may leave everything in thine hands. Thou wilt do better for us than we can do for ourselves. Living or dying may we be the Lord's. And whether or not we see each other again in the flesh, grant that that we may have the hope burning brighter as the days grow darker, that we shall meet in heaven. We pray that none of us may be wrecked by the way; that all of us may be saved, and that we may all meet together a rejoicing household to be forever in the presence of our Father.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit. *Amen.*



### PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt bless the word of truth spoken, and grant that it may do good to every one. May it remove impressions and mistakes that are hindering any. May it quicken some that need quickening. May it encourage some who are on the way toward thee. Stretch out thine hands again to those who have refused thy message to come. Call again to those who have refused to hear. O Lord Jesus! bring back the wandering, and forgive them all their sins, and all their mistakes. Overlook them, and sanctify them, and save them with an everlasting salvation.

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